

News Release



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Spring and Summer Safety Alert...

Fewer Seasonal Lifeguards on some California State Beaches, Lakes and Reservoirs

For the third year in a row, California State Parks will have fewer seasonal lifeguards this spring and summer as a result of the State's well documented and continuing budget problems.

Because of the reductions, State Park Lifeguards are again calling on the public to be aware of the situation and follow the water safety tips being issued.

"State Park managers with responsibility for aquatic programs along California's state beaches, inland lakes and reservoirs, are again facing the reality of reduced seasonal staffing," said Alex Peabody, Aquatic Specialist for California State Parks. "We want to make sure that our visitors know that right up-front because if they follow our water safety tips, they can have a safe and secure summer."

Last year, state park lifeguards rescued a record 10,539 people, approximately 10 percent of all rescues reported in the nation, according to United States Lifesaving Association (USLA) sources. "The majority of those rescues were accomplished by our seasonal lifeguard staff," said Peabody.

Drowning is the leading cause of accidental death in state parks. However, the statistics show that if people continue to follow the water safety tips and stay in places where lifeguards are on duty, their chances of tragedy drop dramatically. In 2003, there were two drownings in guarded water and 23 in unguarded water. In 2002, there were no drownings in guarded water and 20 in unguarded water.

The statistics clearly support the information from the USLA, which estimates the chance of drowning at an American beach protected by lifeguards is less than one in 18 million.

While the trend in park attendance is going up, reduced funding is a fact faced by park managers across the State. With budget reductions at every level of government, State Parks is one of many state agencies faced with difficult decisions on how to achieve those reductions.

“In order to work within our budget,” said Peabody, “the number of seasonal lifeguards and other seasonal staffing must be modified accordingly. Our intention is to alert the public because what makes this so tragic is that these deaths are often preventable.”

Key Public Safety Message for a Safe Summer

Park officials encourage the public to pay close attention to safety signs as they enter the park or access beaches, to swim directly in front of staffed lifeguard towers, where they are available, and to contact their local state park office to learn the locations of the most safe swimming areas.

Lifeguards offer these Top 10 Water Safety Tips:

1. Learn to Swim. It's Fun!
2. Swim near a lifeguard whenever possible. Where beaches, lakes or reservoirs are guarded, stay in the guarded section of the beach.
3. Check Water Conditions Before Entering.
4. Never Swim Alone.
5. Float With a Current.
6. Do Not Dive Headfirst.
7. Never Swim after Consuming Alcohol / Drugs.
8. Wear a Hat and Sunscreen.
9. When Boating, Always Wear a Personal Flotation Device.
10. Encourage Children to Join a Junior Lifeguard Program.

Every year lifeguards throughout the United States perform more than 70,000 open water rescues, according to statistics collected by the USLA. Despite these efforts, drowning continues to be the fourth leading cause of accidental death in the U.S., claiming more than 4,000 lives each year.

“Trimming lifeguard service is an emotionally charged issue,” said Peabody. “We have consulted with lifesaving experts from across the nation and, short of additional funding sources, there are no easy answers. With summer approaching, our first effort will be to continue our educational message to the public and direct park visitors to areas where lifeguard service is provided.”

It is not the first time the Department has been required to reduce lifeguard services because of budgetary shortages. During the economic downturn of the early 1990's, the California State Park workforce was reduced by approximately 10 percent, requiring some of the same types of reductions in services that are necessary this year.

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